

1956

Caxton

Polle Mana from Hopi oia. James Collection. Southwest Museum

The Hopi Indians

their history and their culture

by

Harry C. James

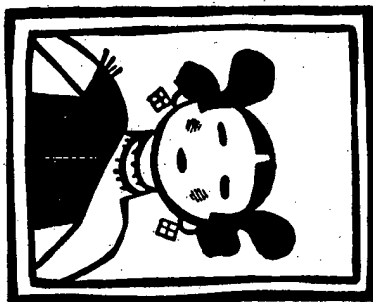
Illustrations by Don Perceval

First printing, March, 1966
Second printing, August, 1966

© 1966 BY
THE CAXTON PRINTERS, LTD.
CALDWELL, IDAHO

Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 66-5841

Printed, lithographed, and bound in the United States of America by
The CAXTON PRINTERS, Ltd.
Caldwell, Idaho
83160



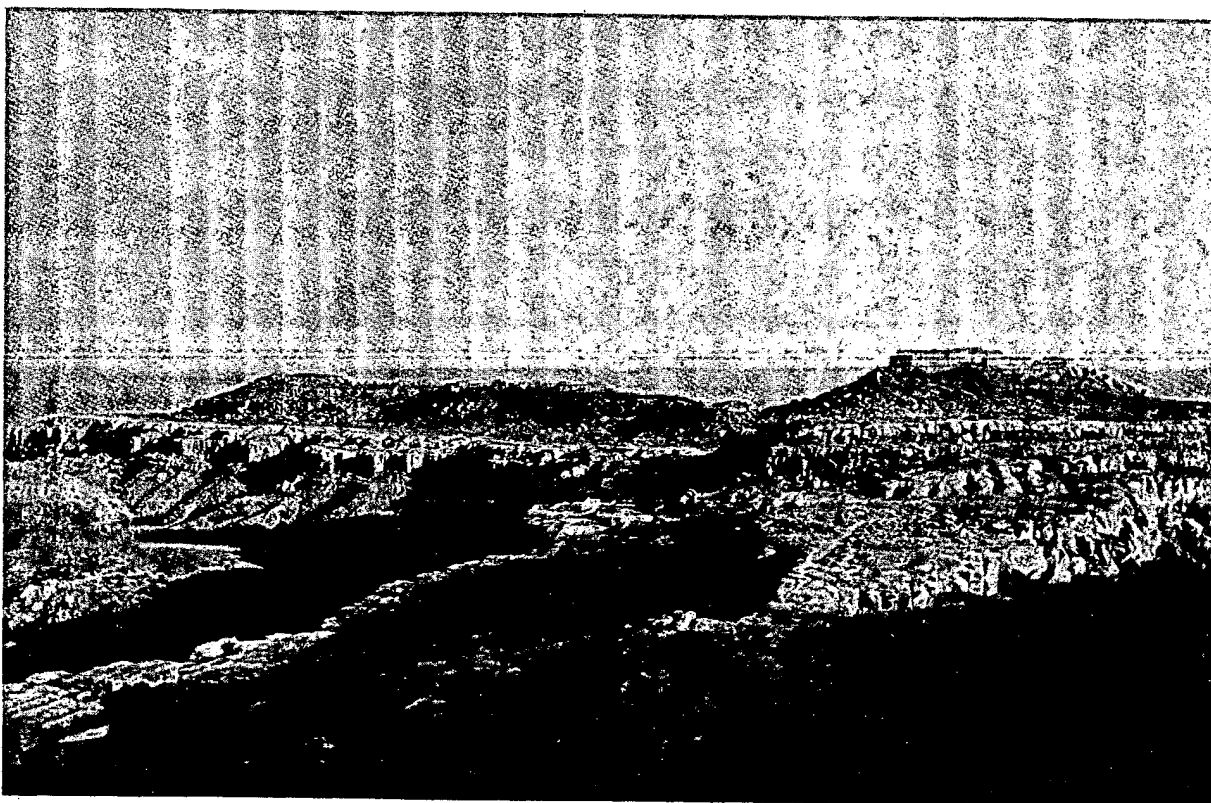
Co Grace

Hopi maiden from Hopi tile, Southwest Museum

green. Deeply rooted in places that retained what scant moisture there was, planted in small hills of several stubby plants that braced each other against the wind, the Hopí corn had easily withstood the dry, searing wind that had demolished the neat, evenly spaced rows of the white man. The old chief, with a mischievous twinkle in his eye, again joked about the low, stubby, uneven planting of his own plot as he bent down to sight along the lines of the expert's corn now virtually nonexistent.

Strange to say, the San Diego Panama-Pacific Exposition of 1915 had a profound influence on Hopí agriculture, particularly with regard to corn. One of the major features of the fair was an Indian village where various representatives of several Southwestern tribes lived in reproductions of two large pueblos and displayed their dances and their crafts. Here these members of widely scattered tribes had a unique opportunity to get acquainted with each other and to exchange ideas and culture patterns. The Hopí seem to have profited chiefly by securing a rich variety of seed corn not only from the other tribes represented, but also from the seed dealers in San Diego.

The Hopí usually locate their small corn plantings on sandy stretches, carefully selected in February and cleared of brush and



MISHONGNOVI (left) and SHIPOLOVI (right)—VILLAGES OF SECOND MESA



YOUNG CAPTIVE EAGLE AT SHONGOPOVI
Later it will be killed ceremonially and its feathers used for religious purposes



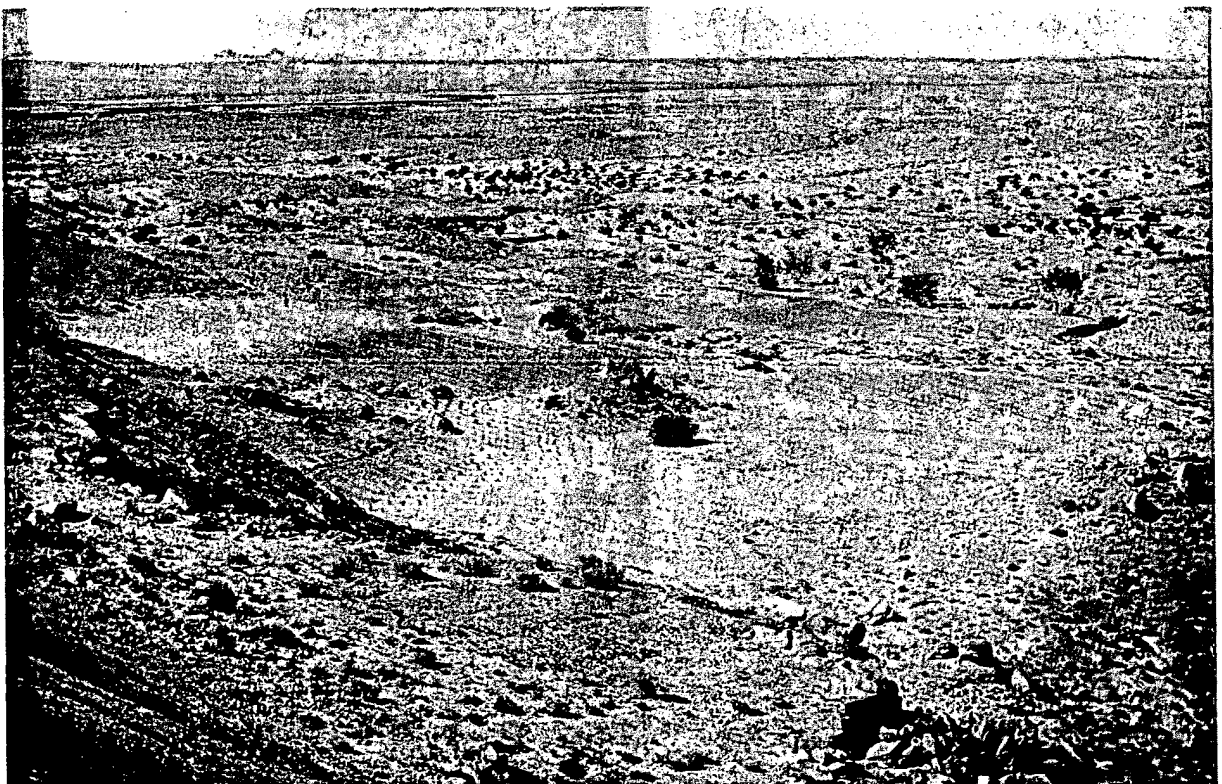
IRRIGATED GARDENS BELOW ONE OF THE SPRINGS AT SHONGOPOVI



HOP! CORN, LIKE THE HOP! HIMSELF, IS SHORT AND STOCKY



THE HOP! GROW CORN OF ALMOST EVERY COLOR OF THE RAINBOW, EXCEPT GREEN



HOP! FIELDS

Peaches, beans, corn, squash, and melons are the chief crops



CORNFIELDS ON THE TOP OF SECOND MESA JUST BACK OF SHONGOPOVI



A HOPI HORSEMAN

weeds. The plantings are moved from spot to spot as the years go by, according to a primitive system of soil conservation. Certain varieties of corn are planted in April, and others later in the season. The planting is done with a stick made of hard wood, some sticks having wedge points and some narrow blades. With this stick a hole a foot or more deep is dug and from six to twelve grains of seed are deposited in it. As the plants germinate and begin to grow, the hole is gradually filled in.

The Hopi corn plant is short and stocky—like the Hopi himself. Bunched closely together, the plants thus gain excellent protection against wind and unseasonable frost. Sometimes beans are planted in the rows between the corn plants, while squash and watermelons are planted in the corners of the field. All summer the fields are carefully tended and kept free of weeds with heavy hoes and wooden trowels.

The Hopi farmer usually continues to live in his village on the mesa top, running out to his farm every morning and back to his home every evening. Some of the fields may be on the mesa tops back of the villages, but most of them are five or six miles away from the village on the desert floor. Writers and lecturers of a few years ago established the fiction that Hopi cornfields were often twenty miles away from the village, and they in-



MESA-TOP CISTERN AT OLD ORAIBI



A CRIER CHIEF OF OLD ORAIBI

sisted that the Hopi ran back and forth every day! The Hopi are indeed good runners, but even they could not sandwich in a good day's work in their cornfields between two twenty-mile jaunts.

When the ears of corn are fully grown, the crop is harvested by breaking off the ears, which are then taken to the village either in great burden baskets or tied up in blankets and borne on the back of man or burro. After the ears are husked they are carefully dried before being stored in the special place which is reserved in every home for this purpose. They are usually sorted out according to color and type, and stacked up in neat piles like stovewood. They are frequently taken out into the sunlight, wiped off and examined for blemish or dust, and then replaced. The corn is stored on the cob, and it is shelled only as needed.

The ingenious Hopi have, I am sure, fifty-seven varieties of cooked corn. They make a fine hominy (*áawa*) by soaking the kernels in wet ashes, then boiling them and washing off the tough hulls. As has been said, every house has a battery of flat stones for the purpose of grinding corn meal. Much of the time of a Hopi housewife has to be spent kneeling behind the metates, or grinding stones, and she is judged by the fineness of her meal. Two or three women will often join in the process,

and the monotony of the job is somewhat alleviated by song and gossip.

Much corn meal goes into the making of piki, the paper-thin bread of the Hopi. Regular piki is made from the meal of blue-gray corn. Special ceremonial piki is made from the meal of sweet corn, or sometimes from white corn meal colored a vivid red with coxcomb. A bright yellow piki is made on occasion by adding false saffron to the white corn meal batter.

The piki stone, called a *comal* in the Southwest, is put into use for the baking. A small fire is built under the stone, which is mounted in its special fireplace in nearly every Hopi house, and it is thoroughly heated through. Then it is oiled with the oil from the pounded seeds of squash or of watermelon, or with any fat that is available. Meantime, the batter is prepared by mixing the corn meal with water to a very thin consistency. To this is added a bit of clean ashes prepared for the purpose by burning some bean straw or salt-bush, for this ash helps to maintain the blue-gray color. The thin batter is spread quickly with the fingers over the hot stone—and it requires considerable skill to do this without burning the fingers! The thin layer cooks very rapidly and the tissue-like sheet is then rolled up into a "stick" which looks like a small roll of newspaper. When piki is fresh,

it is a delicious and satisfying food with a very delicate flavor.

Great quantities of corn are baked in the pit ovens outdoors. All Hopi eagerly await the first harvest of good roasting ears. This corn, of course, is nearly always eaten when it is freshly roasted, but some of the roasted ears are strung together by holes through the stems and dried out in the sun. When thoroughly dried this lot of roasted ears will be stored away for use during the winter. Still other roasted corn is dried and ground into a special meal which is considered a great delicacy, especially when made into dumplings. These corn dumplings are boiled in a pot with juniper twigs and chips, which keep the dumplings apart as they cook and also add flavor to them.

Varieties of Hopi corn are legion. Many of them are traditionally associated with the various world directions. White corn, for instance, which is the major crop, is ceremonially associated with the northeast. A very large type of white corn was introduced into the Hopi country following the famine of 1863. A white corn with a red cob was one of the varieties secured by the Hopi at the San Diego Fair. They got it by trade—from representatives of the Havasupai, a people from the bottom of Grand Canyon.

From the Havasupai also came what is

known as eagle corn, which has white kernels tipped with dark blue and is one of the most striking of the highly colored varieties. For some reason it is sometimes called Navajo corn, or Sacred Navajo corn. There is a corn with speckled blue and white kernels which is called owl corn and which, according to Hopi tradition, was introduced from the Rio Grande pueblos during a period of famine. Kachina corn is a particularly spectacular kind with colors of all sorts in a variety of patterns. Its seed is distributed during some of the kachina dances.

Red corn is seldom raised as a crop, but red ears commonly occur in Hopi fields that are planted to white corn. Red corn is associated with the southwest. It is used for food in the same way that white corn is used. A red ear is often placed at the spot in a house where someone has died. After four days it is picked up and stuck into the rafters until the next planting season, when it is used for seed.

Pink corn is a cross between white and red and is used to make paint for kachina dolls. For this purpose it is boiled and added to clay. Havasupai Chinmark corn is the name applied to a striking red-and-white speckled corn, the pattern of which resembles the chin markings of the Havasupai.

Black corn is not a true black, but a deep purple. It is associated with the zenith. As

its color stains the mouth, this corn is not much used for food. From the cob is made a dye for both cloth and baskets. A body paint for dancers representing certain kachinas is made by boiling black corn with sumac berries and adding white clay. The Hopi claim that they developed this particular black corn but that their strain died out. Some of the seed, they say, had been given to the Havasupai in the old days. At the San Diego Fair, which contributed so much to Hopi corn history, they traded with the Havasupai for some of this black type and so brought it back to the Hopi country.

Yellow corn is associated with the northwest. It ripens early and supplies most of the roasting ears. Another early-ripening corn is one that they speak of as the "greasy corn." It is a light purple or violet in color and has an oily appearance which gives it its name.

Of the blue corn the blue-gray variety, used so extensively in making piki, is the most important and, next to white corn, is planted the most extensively. A blue-black kind was also one of those obtained from the Havasupai at the San Diego Fair. Another flinty, blue-black kind seems to have been secured from the New Mexican pueblo of Santo Domingo. Like the white corn, these blue-black corns are associated ceremonially with the northeast. However, there is one soft blue corn which makes

a very fine meal that is associated with the southwest.

There are many strains of sweet corn in a variety of sizes and colors. Most of them are white or light yellow, with one small variety that is red. Early in the planting season, a small quantity of sweet corn is planted in certain secluded, warm, sunny nooks where it grows very quickly. This planting is kept secret from the children. When the Niman Kachina dance is performed in July, these plants are usually well developed and ready for harvest. The ears are distributed by the dancers, the first fresh corn the people have tasted since the summer before. To the small children particularly, this proves a delightful surprise.

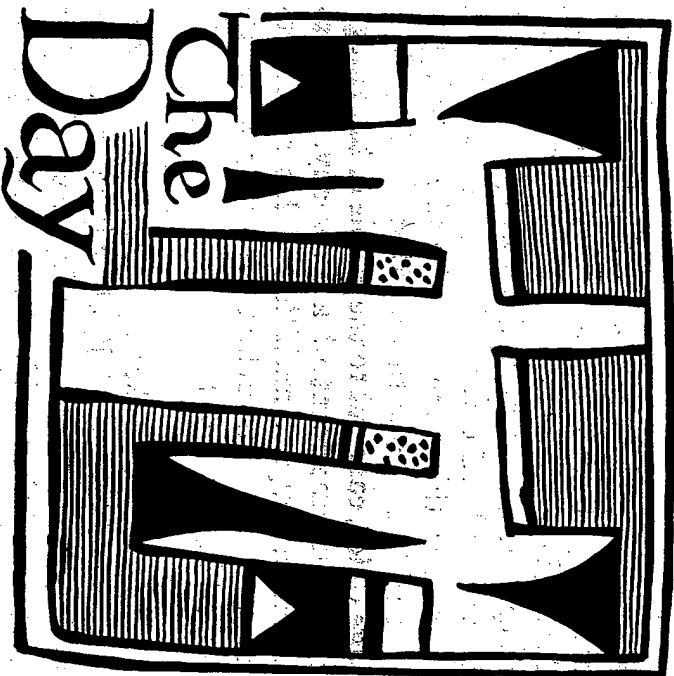
After years of research by many botanists, the origin of corn still remains one of the great mysteries of the world of plants. Recently, evidence was brought to light in the hill country of northern Assam and Burma which would seem to point to the possibility of the Asiatic origin of corn. Other studies seem to point even more directly to the Mexican plateau and to the highlands of Central America as the place of origin. The hard flint corn of the Hopi is probably a direct descendant of the pre-Columbian corn developed in the Latin-American countries from unknown plant ancestors.

Flint corn was once extensively planted by the Hopi, but now it has been almost completely replaced by the varieties described. Hybrid corn recently developed by commercial breeders in the United States is being tried out by a few Hopi farmers, and possibly it may gradually supplant the current varieties. Botanists hope that the hybrid varieties will not replace the native strains too soon, so that they can continue to gather material that may help them to unravel the mystery of this great grass.

Many an adobe wall in Beverly Hills, in Taos, in San Diego, and in Santa Fe is decorated with a cascade of Hopi corn, the husks of which have been braided together so that the brilliantly colored ears can be displayed to the best advantage. Can it be that the owners enjoy not only the colors but the association with the eternal verities of "Mother Earth," recalled to the Hopi themselves by corn and by the symbols of corn that are so large a part of their culture.



Design from Hopi food bowl. Southwest Museum



Hopi tile design. Southwest Museum

THE DAY-BY-DAY LIFE of the Hopi is far from monotonous. The variety of daily experience demonstrates the highly developed culture of these people of the desert, a culture bespeaking their high intelligence. Only by high intelligence could such a rich cultural life be established in such a hostile environment.

To the Hopi there are two dawns—the gray dawn of the first daylight and the yellow dawn